DATE INTERVIEWED: March 10, 1978 TIME INTERVIEWED: 10:15 a.m.

PLACE INTERVIEWED: HSCA OFFICE

NAME: Dennis LeMaster — MLK Exhibit F-171 —

DATE OF BIRTH: SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:

HOME ADDRESS:

BUSINESS ADDRESS: U. S. House of Representatives, Agriculture Committee

HOME TELEPHONE: BUSINESS TELEPHONE:

ASSOCIATES:

MLK INVESTIGATION CONNECTION: FBI Special Agent, Los Angeles, Involved in MURKIN Investigation - 1968. Began working with FBI in 1966 and retired in August 1968.

INTERVIEW STATEMENT:

Dennis LeMaster began working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1966. His second assignment was Los Angeles, California, where he began working in May or June 1967. He primarily dealt with bank robbery cases until January 1968 when he was put on internal security, and ordered to investigate groups which were considered to be black extremist organizations in the Los Angeles area, such as the Black Panther Party and Ron Coringa's US . Until April 4, 1968, when he was assigned to the MURKIN case full time, LeMaster concentrated on the Balck Commandos, a group which turned out to be a hoax funded by the FBI.

LeMaster was not involved in any King security work. He had no personal knowledge of FBI surveillance of Dr. King, though he had heard gossip about tapes which were embarassing to King.

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LeMaster added that he was not assigned to watch King during his visit to LA on March 16. and 17, 1968. (He did note that in 1968 US was hostile to the Black Panther Party, and these militant groups were both hostile to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.)

On April 4, 1968 LeMaster was assigned to the MURKIN investigation. At that time, Wesley Grapp was the Special Agent in Charge of the LA FBI office; Leroy Sheets was appointed the MURKIN case agent (succeeded about two weeks later by Theodore A'Hearn); and Jack Temple, brother of Shirley Temple, was the Chief of Security, although LeMaster added that William John Nolan was the "real brains" of the security detail.

Among other areas, LeMaster was involved in the investigation at the St. Francis Hotel, James Earl Ray's residence from January 21 to March 17, 1968. He interviewed Allan O. Thompson, manager of the St. Francis, who LeMaster described as generally uncooperative and, at times, appeared to be lying. (Ray stayed at this hotel under the assumed name Eric Starvo Galt.) LeMaster did not recall Thompson's story about a J.C. Hardin who attempted to telephone Ray from New Orleans and Atlanta, and ultimately visited the St. Francis. At points Thomspon "had to be pressured" to get him to talk with agents, according to LeMaster.

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The area of the St. Francis Hotel was a racially integrated "den of iniquity", alive with prostitution and drug trafficking, LeMaster said. Informants were used from this section of the city but often they did not pan out. Although the area was integrated and the dingy Sultan Room bar at the St. Francis had a clinetele which included blacks and chicanos, LeMaster thought that most of the residents of the St. Francis, if not all, were white. He surmised that Ray lived in this area not by choice, but in an effort to stay out of the mainstream in an area he could afford economically.

LeMaster found it difficult to understand any antipathy Ray may have had against Dr. King. He described Ray as street-wise criminal who, though not analytically intelligent, had an animal cunning. Ray did not appear to need social interaction and could live on almost nothing by instinct. No one seemed to really know Ray. For instance, Joe Peters, the day bartender at the Sultan Room, spoke with him on several occasions but learned little about Ray. Thus LeMaster concluded that it was conceivable that Ray acted alone in killing Dr. King.

In the course of the MURKIN investigation, LeMaster did look for evidence of racial motive and of a conspiracy. He recalled that Ray had an argument with someone at the Rabbit's Foot Lounge

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about race and made a comment about Watts. LeMaster admitted that he prepared the 302 reports of interviews with Rabbit's Foot bartenders Bo Del Monte and James Morrison. LeMaster read Del Monte's interview with HSCA staff which included Del Monte's denial that a racially inspired argument took place between Ray and another patron as reported by the FBI.

LeMaster responded that his 1968 report was accurate and that he had no reason to falsify or exaggerate the interview summary. The Doug Collins alias Ray used to join the Rabbit's Foot key club, LeMaster explained, was probably simply one of many assumed names he dreamed up.

While investigating Ray's association with the Los Angeles-area Friends of Rhodesia organization, LeMaster interviewed a "rich old white racist" who was originally from Canada. This witness admitted his connection with the pro-Rhodesian group, but denied any association with Ray. LeMaster did not recall this person's name.

LeMaster was not involved in the investigation of the American Independent Party or the George Wallace campaign. He did look into numerous unsolved robberies and burglaries because Ray's expenditures indicated a "variable income". No unsolved crimes were linked to Ray, however.

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LeMaster mentioned that he had talked with Marie Martin, though he was not the first agent to interview her. He characterized Martin as dark-skinned, though commented that Ray probably did not consider her black. It appeared to LeMaster that Martin probably had a sexual relationship with Ray.

In conclusion, LeMaster explained that he worked with the FBI for only about two years, and then returned to college, ultimately receiving a Ph.D. in Economics. He is now employed by the House Agriculture Committee.

Present at interview: Edward Evans, Mel Kreidman, Robin Lindley

Interviewer Signature: Robin Lindley

Typed Signature Robin Lindley

Date Transcribed: 30 August 1994

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